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SUBJECT: PANAMA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT PROFILE
QUESTIONNAIRE (SEPQ) SPRING 2009

REF: A. STATE 13023
     ¶B. PANAMA 00694

Classified By: RSO ED FORTNEY, REASON 1.4 (b,c,d,g)

SECRET/NOFORN

(U) The responses are keyed numerically to the questionnaire
provided in ref A. Ref B is Post's previous SEPQ from August
¶2008.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

¶I. (U) Demonstrations

¶A. Are there any ethnic or religious communities in-country
prone to carrying out significant anti-American
demonstrations? If yes, please describe.

(U) Capable, Yes. The Muslim community in Panama is estimated
to be between 8,000 and 10,000 people. This community held
Anti-American demonstrations in 2007 but did not in 2008.

  i. (U) Yes. On 20 December 2008, there were approximately
60 demonstrators in front of the old chancery to commemorate
the anniversary of the U.S. Operation: Just Cause. This
protest occurs every year and includes leftist labor unions
and family members of Panamanian personnel killed during the
U.S. invasion. The protest was peaceful but did include
burning a U.S. flag that a demonstrator had brought with him.

  ii. (U) Yes, reference demonstration in (i) took place in
front of the former chancery which is still considered a
diplomatic facility.

  iii. (U) 30-60 people.

  iv. (U) When they have occurred it has been because of U.S.
Foreign Policy Initiatives and military action

¶B. Are demonstrations generally violent or peaceful?

(U) Demonstrations are generally peaceful, however there have
been incidents where the protesters and police have clashed.
When these incidents occur, there are massive traffic
disruptions and property damage along the route of the march.

  i. (U) No

  ii. (U) No

¶C. Have any anti-government demonstrations taken place in the
country within the last 12 months?

(U) Yes, with the Presidential election scheduled for May,
there are almost daily anti-government protests and marches.

i. (U) Yes, anti-government demonstrations have taken
place near the old chancery on Balboa Ave., usually in the
form of walking marches. Numerous demonstrations have taken
place to protest everything from social security reform to
transportation reforms, and from teacher salary disputes to
construction worker safety.

    ii. (U) The average size of an anti-government
demonstration could range from 15 to 200 persons. However,
on Aug 14th, 2008 various labor union groups representing
teachers, nurses, and construction workers organized a large
march in downtown Panama City that numbered close to 5,000
persons. The protesters marched from rally points to the
Presidential Palace to protest against a variety of labor
related issues.

    iii. (U) Generally peaceful

    iv. (U) No

II. (U) Macro Conflict conditions

¶A. (S/NF) There is no interstate or intrastate conflict in
Panama. However, the GOP continues to make efforts at
combating the international narco-trafficking elements as
well as elements of the FARC in the Darien Province.
Historically the GOP efforts in successfully engaging
narco-traffickers and elements of the FARC have met with
mixed results. However, recently the USG has noticed an
improved interest and ability on the part of the GOP to
interdict international criminal organizations.

¶B. (U) N/A

¶C. (U) N/A

¶D. (U) N/A

III. (U) Host Country Capabilities

¶A. (U) Are law enforcement agencies professional and
well-trained?

¶A. (S/NF) The Panamanian police services are structured and
professional. However, they are hampered by several factors;
non-responsiveness, lack of manpower, lack of technology, and
lack of mobility all create challenges within the Panamanian
law enforcement community. (Note: All of the U.S. law
enforcement agencies within Embassy Panama report a good
working relationship with local police agencies.)   Law
enforcement officers in Panama receive limited initial
training but future training opportunities are stunted.
Additionally, the law enforcement community is highly
politicized and aggravating this problem is the fact that
there is no civil service system in place in Panama, officers
and inspectors can be fired with little recourse or redress.

¶B. (U) Have they been trained by U.S. Agencies?

(S/NF) Multiple agencies at Post have offered a wide variety
of training (ATA, NAS, LEGATT, DEA, NCIS, ICE, DOD, CBP,
USCG, etc). Specialized vetted units and individual officers
and inspectors have demonstrated an ability to perform
effectively but there are large sections of the police and
security services which remain ineffective. The
effectiveness of the training has been hampered by a lack of
appropriate planning on the part of Panamanian officials in
respect to personnel rotation and lack of retention of those
who have received specialized or technical training.
Refresher training for those specialized skills is lacking.

¶C. (U) Are law enforcement agencies confronted with serious
widespread corruption inside their agencies?

(S/NF) Panamanian law enforcement agencies are confronted
with serious corruption issues. The corruption issue
continues to hinder Panamanian law enforcement, and almost
weekly the local media reports another officer or official

involved in a corruption scandal. At times the mentality
within the law enforcement community is that if an officer
does nothing, one will not be fired, so why risk one's job.
Several Panamanian National Police officers were implicated
in the kidnapping of a USC from a neighborhood in Panama City
in April 2008. Additionally, corruption within the Servicio
Nacional AeroNaval (SENAN) which has the responsibility for
maritime drug interdiction, is widely reported. The former
Director of the SENAN (then referred to as the SMN) is
currently in prison and awaiting trail for smuggling, money
laundering, and other illicit activities. However, there
have been some efforts with in the police services to combat
corruption by the establishment of a disciplinary body and an
internal affairs section to investigate allegations.

¶D. (U) Are the intelligence services professional and capable
of deterring terrorist actions?

(S/NF) Yes. However, host country capabilities are
constrained by lack of resources and training that can limit
their ability to respond and neutralize a threat.

¶E. (U) Have the intelligence services been cooperative with
U.S. Embassy requests?

(S/NF) Yes. The intelligence service is fully cooperative
when they perceive that a particular issue, such as a
terrorist attack, is a threat to Panama.

¶F. (U) Assuming there have been significant terrorist threats
in recent years, have host country services had any major
anti-terrorism successes?

(S/NF) Yes. Two Iranian "journalists" filming areas of
interest, to include the Panama canal and the airport, were
briefly detained by Panamanian authorities in late June 2006.
 Though not necessarily viewed as an anti-terrorism success,
it is certainly viewed as a success for the Panamanian law
enforcement community.

¶G. (U) Has host country been responsive to U.S. Embassy
requests for protective security?

(SBU) Yes. From October 2006 until May 2007 and again in
January 2008, we had an on-going protective detail for
President Bush's daughter who had been living in Panama. In
2008, the GOP was very responsive in providing protective
security for several USG delegations including; FLOTUS, the
Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Health and Human
Services. The cooperation between Panamanian protective
security and the embassy has been outstanding.

¶H. (U) How does the Embassy assess the overall security at
major airports?

(S/NF) Good overall, very good for the region. Tocumen is
the International Airport. It is a modern airport that has
received major renovations and funding from US agencies to
update and streamline the customs and immigration procedures
and resources. Each U.S. airline also employs private
security at their individual boarding gates. (Note: There is
a concern that there is insufficient control or screening of
passengers transiting Panama. If a passenger arrives from
another international airport, they do not have to go through
any additional screening prior to boarding their connecting
flight, except for those boarding US. bound flights as the
individual airlines employ security personnel to inspect the
carry-on luggage of all departing passengers.)

¶I. (U) How effective are customs and immigration controls
agencies?

(S/NF) Average. Panama does not have the technology systems
to implement customs and immigration screening similar to
what is found in the US. Corruption is also a concern in the
customs and immigration procedures.

¶J. (U) How effective are border patrol forces?

(S/NF) Average. Technology, manpower, mobility, and impenetrable jungle greatly complicate border patrol operations in Panama's Darien province on the border with Colombia. The FARC and criminal organizations operate freely across the Panama-Colombia border. The FARC maintains semi-permanent to permanent bases in this remote region. Panamanian officials do not have a TECS or NCIC type system. If there is a BOLO for a person entering or exiting Panama, the authorities have to post the suspect's photograph at the inspection station. Panama is in the process of creating a border police force with a greater emphasis in military style training and organizational structure.

Indigenous Terrorism

IV. (U) Anti-American terrorist groups

¶A. (U) No.

¶B. (U) N/A.

¶C. (U) No.

¶D. (U) N/A.

¶E. (U) No.

¶F. (U) No.

¶G. (U) N/A.

¶H. (U) N/A.

¶V. (U) Other Indigenous Terrorist Groups

¶A. (U) No.

¶B. (U) N/A

¶C. (U) No.

¶D. (U) N/A

¶E. (U) No.

VI. Transnational Terrorism

(U) Transnational Terrorism Indicators

¶A. Are there any foreign terrorist groups that have a presence in-country?

(S/NF) The FARC has an established logistical network in Panama and has used Panama to launder funds, move arms, and transport narcotics. It also sustains a constant low level presence in Panama's Darien province operating from semi-permanent and permanent bases. In January 2006, it kidnapped a dual U.S.-Spanish citizen, and his Spanish citizen father. The two were subsequently released unharmed in early April 2006.
There are also "indicators" that money is being funneled to Hizballah and possibly Hamas from Panama to include the Colon duty free zone. In 2008, the FARC kidnapped a U.S. citizen from a suburb of Panama City where U.S.G. employees reside and did not release him until February 2009.

¶B. (U) How does Post assess this presence?

(S/NF) The FARC can be categorized as support and finance cells (57th Front). These cells have traditionally been logistical in nature, but there has been some activity in the Bahia Pina area where recreational fishermen from a nearby fishing lodge were fired upon by a suspected FARC go-fast boat which had apparently broken down and was adrift. Additionally, there were recent reports that elements

associated with the FARC raided a village and robbed local stores of supplies. With regards to Hizballah and Hamas, there is a strong suspicion, as yet unconfirmed, that financial cells exist in Panama.

¶C. (U) Is the host government sympathetic to these groups?

(S/NF) In regards to the FARC, the Panamanian Government has historically had a "Live and Let Live" policy. There are individuals within the Panamanian security services who are reluctant to challenge the FARC out of concern that the FARC would take retaliatory measures in Panama that the government would be ill-equipped to respond to. As an indication of this attitude, the GOP generally prefers to refer to them as armed Colombian criminal organizations and not use the acronym FARC. The GOP has recently expressed its intent to take a more active role in combating the FARC and the GOP has arrested several FARC logistical operatives in Panama City. Regarding Hizballah and Hamas, and other Islamic terrorist groups, the Panamanian Government is not sympathetic to their goals and works with USG agencies to identify any potential terrorist threat.

¶D. (U) Are there suspect non-government organizations in the country that have a relationship with these groups?

(S/NF) There is unconfirmed information that the FARC in the past has used religious NGO's to launder their funds.

¶E. (U) Are there any ethnic or religious communities in-country that are sympathetic to these groups.

(S/NF) Some of indigenous communities (Embera Wounaan) have supported the FARC, but Post suspects that this is out of fear and poverty, not shared ideology. Four members of the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) - Tied group Askapena visited the Kuna Indians in San Blas in the fall of 2006. The ETA affiliated visitors were reaching out to the indigenous population in Panama in an effort to strike up unity among the two groups and met with the leadership of several leftist student and union groups in Panama City before they left.
Additionally, there are ten mosques throughout Panama, and between 8,000 and 10,000 Muslims living in Panama. The majority of the Muslims are originally from India and Lebanon. The Lebanese community conducted peaceful marches to protest the summer of 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

¶F. (U) How does Post assess the level of hostile intelligence services?

(S/NF) The only possible hostile intelligence service in Panama with a history connected to anti-American terrorist acts is Libya. Note: The Libyan Government announced that it will be closing its mission in Panama. However, the Russian, Cuban, Chinese, and Venezuelan governments all maintain diplomatic missions in Panama and while they may not foster terrorist acts are hostile to U.S. Government goals.

¶G. (U) How does Post assess the availability of weapons and explosives in-country?

(S/NF) Panama is a transit area for the illicit arms market, as such weapons and explosives are easily obtainable.

STEPHENSON